



"Niagara Rhodo"

Newsletter of the Niagara Chapter,
Rhododendron Society of Canada,
District 12, American Rhododendron Society



2018 Christmas Newsletter



Our Purpose

We are a non-profit organization whose aim is to promote, encourage and support interest in the genus *rhododendron*. Our goal is to encourage gardeners to grow and appreciate these plants, by providing educational meetings with knowledgeable speakers, access to topical publications and hosting joint meetings with other chapters.

By becoming a successful grower, the reader will be exposed to a contagion for which there is no cure. Once infected with an appreciation of rhododendrons and azaleas most gardeners spend a lifetime collecting these most beautiful of all plants.

H. Edward Reiley

Season's Greetings and Best Wishes for 2018

President's Christmas Message

Season's Greetings!

As 2018 draws to a close, members of the Niagara Chapter's Board of Directors have reflected on the range of activities successfully offered to members. Dynamic speakers with interesting, currently relevant topics continue to be identified, and we are grateful that these individuals have chosen to accept our invitation to share their knowledge and experiences with us. The Newsletter continues to search out relevant issues and topics to report, topics which we hope assist members to successfully grow rhododendrons and to enjoy their unique characteristics. In addition to having time to chat with colleagues over homemade sweets and coffee or tea at our regular "speaker's meetings, this year, we enjoyed a wonderful July afternoon picnicking in the splendid garden at the home of Shelia Hirsch-Kalm and her husband, Michael in St. David's (Niagara-on-the-Lake). Both the food and the visit were inspirational, providing ideas for garden design, plant selection, and use of garden pots for spectacular seasonal plants, and sculpture, while enjoying Michael's culinary creations and those introduced by our members.

While we continue to identify sources of interesting rhododendrons and azaleas, at advantageous prices, we have noticed that it is becoming more difficult to obtain cultivars that are not commonly available, or unusual cultivars of interest to collectors. Accordingly, we have broadened our search activities and are exploring ways to have special plants appear regularly in our inventory on offer to members. To this end we are exploring ways to obtain cuttings from local collections and from those of our friends in the United States and Finland, to be rooted at the excellent facilities at Van Veen Nurseries. Our "Vineland Azalea Introductions" project and the "Brueckner Test Project" are part of our endeavour to identify cultivars appropriate for our continually changing, less predictable weather and to identify those that can also meet the challenge of phytophthora and powdery mildew.

Within the context of this continuing search for improved services to members, we are forever mindful that a dedicated and enthusiastic group of volunteers is the backbone of our voluntary organization. We thank you all.

On behalf of the Board of Directors I wish for you and your families a happy Christmas season, and good health, prosperity and a flourishing garden in 2019.

Sondra Meis, President



2019 Program

Meetings & Plant Sale



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2019. Darell Bley, Curator woody plants, Niagara Parks Botanical Gardens; Instructor, arboriculture & horticultural practices for young trees in Urban environments. *TOPIC: Care and protection of plants and trees in the natural ecosystem under challenge from adverse climatic conditions.*



SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 2019. Kevin Kavanagh & Nick Yarmoshuk. *TOPIC: What's in the Plant Sale? Somethings old, somethings new, nothing borrowed, some almost blue.; describe for each cultivar its strengths, weakness & appropriate growing conditions.*



SATURDAY, APRIL 6 & SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2019. International Speaker TBA. *TOPICS TBA*



SATURDAY, APRIL 26, 2019. Annual General Plant Sale. Starts at 9 A.M. Closes when plants sold out. Implement shed. Vineland Research & Innovation Centre. Victoria Ave. Vineland Station, ON

SUNDAY, MAY 26, 2019. TIME & DETAILS TBA. *Laviolette Rhododendron Garden Tour & Pot Luck picnic. Visit the garden designed and installed by Tom, Retired Director, Niagara Parks Botanical Gardens, School of Horticulture, Butterfly Conservatory, Parks Landscape Design, NPC Greenhouse Plant Production and Floral Show Houses.*



All meetings are held in Rittenhouse Hall, Vineland Research & Innovation Station, Victoria Avenue, Vineland Station (at exit 57 – Victoria Avenue - travel north – toward the Lake – on Victoria Avenue)

2018 – The Year in Review

OUR 2018 SPEAKERS PROGRAM – delivered from November 2017 to November 2018 provided interesting observations and discussions on a wide range of topics. Liz Maliki, an intrepid traveler and thoughtful horticultural observer discussed the flora and climate of Iceland while Tom Laviolette, a thoughtful cultural observer and retired director of the Niagara Parks Commission's horticultural and educational landscape offered a warm, respectful and insightful discussion of his experience among the Haida Gwaii and their environment.



Photos by respective authors



2018
Speakers

Travelers
&
Scientists

From left to right: Liz Malicki, Robbie Hart, Tom & Sandra Laviolette, Julianna Medeiros

Dr. Robbie Hart reported on his findings from the mountains in China on impact of temperature on tissue growth of rhododendrons and Dr. Julianna Medeiros discussed the unexpected results on root size, root length and range of bacteria types present on the roots of rhododendron varieties. Talk summaries were posted in Special Edition Newsletters.

2018 – The Year in Review (cont'd)

THE 2018 PLANT SALE – was held again on the last Saturday of April. The implement garage continued to be our venue while Michael Josiak and his staff provided invaluable service, without which, the sale would not have been possible. Volunteers delivered plants from Indiana, Pennsylvania on Thursday night, and on Friday morning from suppliers in southern Ontario. Sorting, arranging and final counting was completed by Friday night.

Preparing for Sales: Volunteers in action



The sale moves ahead on Saturday morning



2018 – The Year in Review (cont'd)

Sales cont'd: Members offering advice and happy buyers



THE 2018 PICNIC – The highlight of 2018 was the picnic and garden tour in July at the home of Sheila Hirsch Kalm and her husband Michael in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Sheila is a very active lady with many community interests. In addition to her unceasing horticultural activities and support of our Chapter's work, she contributes considerable time and effort to the annual *Gardens of Hope* drive held in the early spring.



The 2018 Picnic Cont'd - The following series of photographs attempt to depict experiences of this year's picnic: the warmth of Sheila's and Michael's hospitality, the chef's delight in preparing the central dishes, the high quality of the pot-luck dishes; the exquisite arrangement of the garden's elements, with a large number of interesting flora to create a wonderfully relaxed informal environment. The delight of the more than 40 participants in visiting this garden and enjoying the welcoming atmosphere was evidenced by attending, until late in the afternoon, and willingly accepting the freely offered water hyacinths.





The Vineland Azalea Legacy Project – The Vineland deciduous azaleas growing, in the large bed in front of Rittenhouse House, were developed when Vineland was still the Horticultural Research Institute of Ontario, an agency of the Ontario Provincial Government. With the retirement of Bob Fleming and Al Smith the Rhododendron hybridizing program was terminated. After the Vineland Innovation and Research Centre was created, the last remaining vestiges of the Vineland Rhododendron Project were the “Chelsea Reach” azaleas, several cultivars of elepidotes and some deciduous azaleas, all randomly located. It should be noted that the sole record that exists of the development of these cultivars states that “the cross (*date varies* for each cultivar), was raised, named, and described by A.W. Smith”.



After Al Smith retired in the early 1990's, it has been the ambition of Niagara Region Chapter members to propagate these unique hybrids to preserve their genetics. They are reputed to be highly resistant to *Powdery Mildew*. Indeed, in our 28 year experience with the azalea bed in which these hybrids are growing, no plant growing there has offered evidence of the presence of *Powdery Mildew*.

In 2014, Earl Sommerville, gardening in Mariette Georgia, an azalea enthusiast and an expert in operating a private, non-commercial, tissue culture laboratory, contacted the chapter to offer his micro-propagation services to develop the entire colony of Vineland so there may be a collection of these plants available for future generations of azalea enthusiasts.

Peter Phelps, Kevin Kavanagh and the Chair of the **ARS Test & Display Garden Committee**, Nick Yarmoshuk, sent cuttings of all azaleas in the Vineland bed and have worked with Sommerville to provide adequate cuttings to develop sufficient micro-propagated material to permit Mike Medeiros, of **Plane View Nursery** in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, to produce more than 1400 liners of some 15 cultivars. **Blue Sky Nursery**, informed of the availability of these azaleas, is now developing these azaleas for sale in 2 gallon pots in 2021. These deciduous azaleas were invited to be included in the **ASA Azalea Legacy Project**. The azalea growing community eagerly awaits these plants. We thank each agency for supporting this program.

WELCOME NEWS TO NIAGARA RAFFLE WINNERS: Members of the Niagara Chapter will recall that on two occasions the Vineland azaleas were offered as raffle prizes. The winners of these raffles have been patient because the plants were not distributed to winners. It was felt that to set the available liners into gardens at their very young stage would be to risk disappointment. We have now been told that the first group of

200 Carousel azaleas, now growing at Blue Sky Nursery in one gallon pots, will be ready in April 2019 for distribution to the raffle winners. The remaining 1200 will be available for wider distribution in 2 gallon pots in 2021. The winners' patience will be rewarded, when they become the first in Niagara to receive the first plants to be distributed from this collection. Of course, all cultivars propagated in this program will be made available, first to members and then more widely.

Winter (January-February) 2019 forecast update: Winter locks in for next two months

*Dr. Doug Gillham. Meteorologist, PhD. Thursday, December 20, 2018, 6:00 AM,
from the Weather Network website*

Winter weather arrived early during the fall season across most of Canada, but December has featured periods of milder weather, putting a white Christmas in jeopardy for most southern Canadian cities. Will this milder pattern continue into the heart of winter? According to the Weather Network's Winter Forecast, it depends on which part of Canada you call home. The temperature forecast highlights two distinct patterns for the months of January and February across



Canada. Above seasonal temperatures are expected to dominate across western Canada with below normal temperatures dominating for most of eastern Canada. In between, back and forth swings in temperatures should come close to offsetting each other.

The dominant storm track this winter is expected to be from the Gulf of Mexico, up the eastern Seaboard of the U.S. and into Atlantic Canada. This is expected to bring above normal precipitation (including snowfall) to Atlantic Canada. Across the rest of Canada, snow totals are expected to be near normal, but a large region from southern B.C. to Northwestern Ontario could see less snow than normal during the months of January and February.

Noted for Eastern Ontario and Southwestern Quebec

December has featured periods of milder weather and little snow across most of eastern Ontario and Quebec. However, this does not mean that we are going to get it easy this year.

As we look back at history, a couple years really stand out as being similar to what we have seen this year, both in terms of the global pattern and in our local weather. 2002 and 2014 both had an early start to winter in November followed by an extended period of mild weather for the second half of December and into early January. Both winters then turned severely cold for the second half of winter. That does not mean that the rest of this winter will necessarily be as severe as February 2015,

but this does highlight why one should not judge the winter just based on December. We still believe that we are on track for colder than normal temperatures for January and February.

This region will see numerous clippers but fewer moisture-laden Colorado and Texas Lows are expected. An abundance of lake effect snow is expected for the traditional snow belts east and southeast of the Great Lakes due to frequent shots of arctic air. This should mean near normal snowfall totals despite fewer high impact storms than normal. However, areas outside of the snow belts, including the Greater Toronto Area, could fall short of normal snowfall as the dominant storm track will typically be south and east of the region.

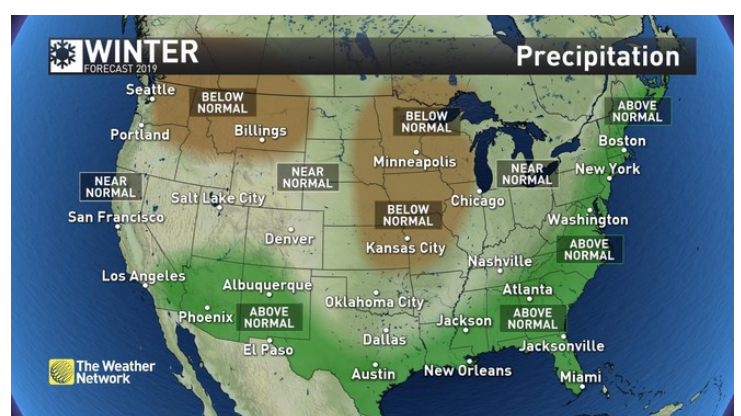
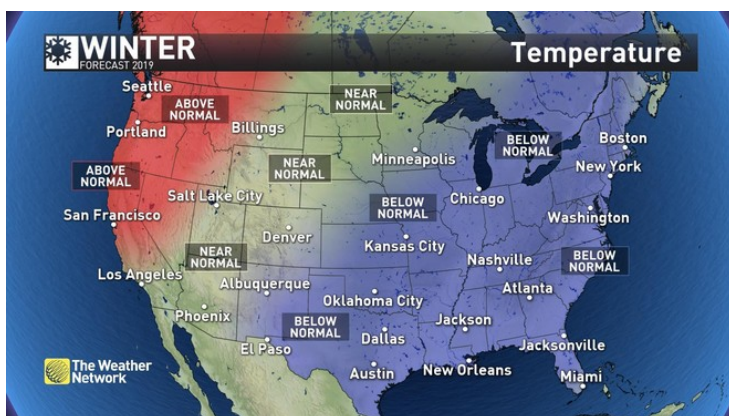
OUTLOOK FOR RHODODENDRONS

The persistent dull, rainy weather in October through to December has provided welcome water to shrubs and trees that have been parched through this past summer's drought. We hope that this wet period has been sufficient to replenish the moisture to an appropriate depth to help deal with whatever drought may occur in summer 2019. Ideally, gardeners would have attempted to provide adequate moisture through irrigation during any dry periods in September through November. The importance of this practice was hi-lighted for me by Kevin Kavanagh on a number of occasions this past fall. Certainly, the rains were welcome to those, such as your editor, who tends to ignore watering rhodos in the cool weather.

Those of us who are fortunate to have one or three mature oaks growing among the rhododendrons will have saved the leaves and provided light, fluffy, winter mulch around the plants. This is an excellent way to provide protection to an excellent depth to help overcome winter leaf burn, and to protect flower buds on marginally hardy cultivars. Of course, the oak leaves start to decompose during the summer to provide welcome organic residue. While snow is always welcome as protection and future irrigation, lack of snow makes more food available to the bunnies that inhabit some areas. When habitual food sources are scarce, rabbits and deer will feast on deciduous azaleas and other delicacies. While such feasting does assist in promoting multi-branching and eventual bushy plants, one then requires several years and metres of chicken wire to start to enjoy the azalea's blooms.

OUTLOOK FOR SNOWBIRDS

Colder than normal temperatures are expected across most of the southeast U.S. including Florida, during January and February. Of course, this region will still see periods of warm and sunny weather, but occasional shots of Arctic air are expected deep into the southern U.S., and like last winter that



includes the risk of wintry precipitation all the way to the Gulf of Mexico a couple of times during the season.

In addition, above normal precipitation is expected across much of the southern U.S. as an active subtropical jet stream crosses the region. This pattern will also increase the threat for severe weather at times during the winter across the Gulf States, including Florida.

An Out-of-season Reflection on Over-head Watering

For effective transfer of water between the center of a root-ball and the surrounding soil, the root-ball should originally be planted so that the surface of the ball, as it is removed from the pot, is roughed up and spread out. This maximizes direct contact area between the surrounding soil and the root-ball and is essential for later water movement in and out of the root-ball. When planting a rhododendron, the root-ball should have been well "roughed up" to maximize contact surface area between the roots and surrounding soil.

Water from a sprinkler system can be unreliable as to coverage. Each plant needs to be checked to make sure it gets enough moisture. For newly planted shrubs, with the high heat of many recent summers, a daily half hour watering is not enough. That amount of water is barely enough for a well-established plant assuming drainage is excellent. Poor drainage and heavy watering will spell death to a rhodo as easily as can drought.

Very often water applied to newly installed plants, especially from an automatic system, fails to wet the actual root ball and runs off into the surrounding soil. Once a root ball gets very dry it can be difficult to re-wet it. The best method is to put a hose on a very slow trickle right next to the trunk for an hour or more. Often one can build a dam of soil around the root area. Then fill the area inside the dam with water that is less likely to run off. Finally, mulch with 2-3 inches of composted or shredded oak leaves, aged wood chips or finely shredded bark mulch. Plant high, compensate for hole depth so the stem is never buried. *(Edited by Nicholas Yarmoshuk. Original by Ron Rabideau, formerly of Rarefind Nursery.)*

The Brueckner Rhododendron Test Project: A note to all participants and to members from Christina Woodward.

Dear Friends, Chers Amis

In many ways this has been an extraordinary year. But here I speak only for the Test rhododendrons under our care! Many of you have shared the progress of your plants, and most of you have been diligent in keeping up with observations and measurements. I hope it has been a useful experience in exploring how these plants develop.

Before we say goodbye to 2018, I'd like to share two recent, exciting developments on the Brueckner Test Project, both of which will refine and help standardize our evaluation criteria and metrics. First, as discussed at the 2017 Symposium, a mechanism for data entry and analysis is currently in process, with a first draft template of a customized website expected early in 2019. Second, the Project has caught the attention, and encouragement, of the Rhododendron Research Network (RRN), a new collaborative initiative between the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) and an international group of Rhododendron researchers. Much to look forward to in 2019!

Let's prepare for the New Year with a cheery Christmas and happy holidays.